



# Plague Vaccine

## *What You Need to Know*

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*Deployment Medication Information Sheets (DMIS) are provided by the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM). Written for soldiers and their families, they provide basic information on deployment medications that are intended as guidance only; consult your health care provider for more information.*

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### **What is plague? How do you get it?**

Plague is a severe infection that can be fatal; it is caused by the bacterium, *Yersinia pestis*. Plague occurs primarily in wild rodents (rats, mice, and squirrels) but can be transmitted to humans. Symptoms depend on the form of plague: the bubonic form—from the bite of an infected rodent flea—includes high fever and painful swollen lymph nodes; the pneumonic form—from inhaling droplets breathed by infected people—includes a cough, shortness of breath, and coughing up blood. Fever, chills, headache, and rapidly progressive weakness are characteristic of all forms of plague. Most untreated patients die within a few days.

### **Who should get the vaccine and how is it given?**



- Vaccination against plague is not required by any country as a condition for entry. In the past, the vaccine was recommended only for people who were at high risk of field exposure to rodents and their fleas, in areas where the disease was present. In most of the countries of Africa, Asia, and the Americas where plague is reported, the risk of infection exists primarily in rural mountainous or upland areas.
- The plague vaccine is no longer commercially available. The previous vaccine consisted of a series of three injections. Doses one and two were given 1 to 3 months apart. The third dose was given 5 to 6 months after dose two. After the third dose, additional booster doses were given every 1 to 2 years.

Travelers who genuinely may be at risk for acquiring plague because of unavoidable exposure should consider antibiotic preventive treatment and should use insect repellents containing DEET on skin and clothing. Clothing can also be treated with insecticidal sprays containing permethrin..

### **What does the military require?**

There is no current requirement.

### **Are there any side effects?**

- You may have irritation, redness, swelling, warmth, itching, bruising, or pain at the injection site.
- Other side effects include fever (up to 103°), muscle or joint aches, swollen glands, general body discomfort, headache, nausea, or a rash between the fifth and twelfth day after the vaccination. If these symptoms continue or become bothersome, inform your health care provider.

- Although rare, notify your health care provider if you experience any of the following after vaccination: dizziness, vomiting, tingling of the hands or feet, hearing difficulties, vision problems, or seizures.

### **Is there any reason I shouldn't get the vaccine?**

- Tell your health care provider if you have any illnesses, infections, blood disorders, immune system disorders, or allergies.
- Tell your health care provider if you're taking any over-the-counter or prescription medicine, especially steroids or prednisone.
- Use of cholera vaccine at the same time may increase the risk of adverse effects.
- Effectiveness is decreased with use of immune globulin (IG) or other live vaccine if given within 1 month of vaccination.

### **What if I'm pregnant or breast-feeding?**

- This medication should be used only if clearly needed during pregnancy. Discuss the risks and benefits with your health care provider.
- It is not known if this medication appears in breast milk. Consult your health care provider before breast-feeding.

#### **You *can* avoid getting plague!**

- Get each vaccination as scheduled.
- Other preventive measures include rodent control and the use of insect repellents to reduce the incidence of flea bites.
- If you have been in contact with an infected person, you should be treated with antibiotics immediately.

**Be sure the vaccination is recorded in your medical record.**

### **Where can I get more information?**

- Health care provider at your military treatment facility.
- Military Immunizations web page: <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/immunization/vaccines.html>
- CDC Specific Disease web sites: [www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm)  
[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/plague/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/plague/index.htm)
- See other Deployment Medication Information Sheets (DMIS):
  - DEET Repellent
  - Permethrin Treated Clothing

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